

***- Hall's Bill Will Hold 2007 Bonuses on Hold until Claims Backlog Reduced Substantially -***

***- Senior VA Officials Rewarded with 'Most Lucrative' Performance Bonuses in Government While Veterans Wait for Benefits -***

Washington, DC – Congressman John Hall (D-NY19) announced today that he will introduce legislation to freeze all fiscal year 2007 bonuses set to be paid to senior level Veterans Affairs Department officials until the VA has reduced its backlog of benefit cases to fewer than 100,000 claims.

"It is shocking and scandalous even by the VA's own low standards that top officials at the VA would be getting the most lucrative performance bonuses in government when there is a backlog of over 600,000 benefits cases," said Hall. "Why are these top political appointees being rewarded with budget busting bonuses when veterans are waiting longer and longer for benefits they desperately need?"

Hall serves as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. His legislation comes in light of revelations reported yesterday by The Associated Press that senior officials received more than \$3.8 million in 2006 as bonuses from the underfunded Veterans Affairs Department that recently faced a shortfall of \$1 billion that jeopardized veterans' health care.

One of the officials to receive a top bonus of \$33,000 was the deputy undersecretary for benefits, who helps manage a disability claim system with a backlog of more than 600,000 cases and average delays of 177 days.

"The Bush administration has spouted a lot of platitudes about the principle of pay for performance," said Hall. "But somehow their own appointees at the VA get the pay while our veterans get stuck waiting for the performance."

The Associated Press also reported that the annual bonuses to senior VA officials, which averaged more than \$16,000 for 2006, are the highest in government.

The VA's fiscal year 2007 bonuses are currently set to be paid in September of this year.

Legislation Hall is introducing will prevent the payment of these bonuses until the VA reduces the claims backlog to fewer than 100,000 cases.